**Ostrava** **Symposium (Dis)Connecting Tensions**.

**SHORT SUMMARY**

1. What is racism

2. Roots of Racism

3. Patterns of Racism

4. Strategies of Resistance

\* Educative function of anti-discriminatory laws and promoting good race relations

\*Electoral politics – calling them out?

\*Standing alongside those who experience racism and building communities of resistance and anti-fascist defence structures

5. Conclusion: (Dis)Connecting Tensions – what is possible, and what is not

**1.What is racism?**

All racisms are the same, and all racisms are different. Racism starts with stereotyping and moves to demonization, you demonise to exclude. Different kinds of racism come to the fore in different periods of history – and today, as we see the growth of powerful political forces calling for national preference in employment, housing, economic policies – America First in the US, the Front National in France, etc – what is common to all racisms is the idea of ‘our own people first’, ‘natives first’, ‘nativism’, insider-outsider racism, xeno-racism.

(images, America First, We Support Trump, Tomio Okamura)

Racism is rooted in history, global and local, but is always culturally specific, depending on history, culture and national identity. But in our era which is characterised by global wars and international breakdown as well as the technology to project war and conflict into your homes 24 hours a day no country in Europe is isolated from the international – with particularly virulent strains of racism interacting with domestic strains in a potent mix. No more so than the Islamophobia that has emerged from the War on Terror that is one of the dominant strains of racism in Europe today, interacting with nativism, patriotism and the idea that anyone who supports the multicultural society, believes that immigrants have civil rights, is a traitor to the national interest

(image, Soros Plan, National Consultation on Soros Plan, allegedly flooding Europe with one million migrants a year)

**The stages of racism**

On a day to day level, these international and national trends obscure, but make no mistake, they influence and determine people attitudes. Perhaps we most often come into contact with racism in the attitudes of others, or in the obstacles to inter-personal relations, or in a lack of community cohesion, or in the presence of far-right and neo-nazi groups in our community

But it’s important to understand where attitudes come from.What I want to do in this session is encourage you to think about racism as a structural aspect of our society, something derived from our history, but also ever present all around us, in popular culture, in election campaigning, in the institutions that govern us, if we only care to see. What are the obstacles to inter-personal relations, and how can we overcome them....

But it might be useful to break down the various stages of racism so that we can understand the difference between prejudice , bigotry, racialist frameworks, discrimination, institutional and state racism.

The rise of National Socialism and the horror of the Holocaust means that fascism has become the dominant reference point for any discussion of racism in Germany, but maybe here too in the Czech Republic?. Of course, that's important, but just as sexism which is linked to patriarchy has many different aspects, and manifests itself differently in different cultural contexts, racism too has many different avatars. It can manifest itself in attitudes, in discrimination (the acting out of prejudice, denial of goods and services on the basis of colour, nationality, ethnicity or religion), but it can also be a part of popular culture (a kind of common-sense racism) or part of the instrumental logic and culture of institutions (institutional racism) or woven into the ideology and laws of the state (state racism). There is such a thing to as cultural racism – which has replaced scientific racism as the more respectable way of being a racist

Institutional racism is a term in the UK context which was adopted from the Black Panther movement in the US, where Stokely Carmichael used it in the context of the struggle to overcome racial segregation in schooling etc.

(image Brown v Board of Education, decision to end segregation in schools)

DH & Others versus the Czech Republic

If you have immigration legislation that overtly discriminates against people from different parts of the world because of their race, we can talk about immigration laws as an aspect of state racism. If a country's institutions are built on racial segregation, if Roma children can't go to the same schools as white Czech children, then we can talk about state racism.

**2. Roots of Racism**

Europe has a long history of racism and authoritarianism – colonialism, imperialism, scientific racism and eugenics all emerged from Europe. The traces of that history remain in the way that the national community is perceived and the way threats to that national community are identified. The trouble for you in the Czech Republic was that the Communist period disconnected you with that earlier history, for the public myth was that Communism defeated racism **–** not only that, but as far as I understand it, because fascism was more deeply embedded in Slovakia, the Czechs can perceive themselves as ‘without blemish’ – all the bad things are projected onto ‘the other’, Slovakians, the Roma, migrants, Muslims. It reminds me very much of the Scandinavian way of understanding race. And you see in the racist literature and racist movements in Czech Republic, this constant reference to the ‘decent citizens’, the ‘dissatisfied citizens’, already othering, and conjuring up pictures of ‘bad citizens’ and citizens that are perhaps satisfied because they are taking things away from others.

History. Colonial power or subjugated nation – arrogance or victimhood. Images Make Britain Great Again/Take Back Control/Hungarian Government Information Poster)

UK – Take Back Control – some countries have a strong perception of themselves as a global leader, others a victim, particularly of Nazism, refusing to acknowledge the role they played.

(Example Poland, Law & Justice, now of draft legislation criminalising  criminalising anyone attributing the crimes of Nazi Germany to the Polish nation.

(Contagion to Czech Republic, as well as Soros Plan, hence Zemen call for a Hungarian style crackdown on NGOs, limiting their influence and accusing Soros of imposing ‘supranational governance’ on the country.

Other countries see themselves as ‘not a country of immigration’ and therefore never a multicultural society. (Germany, guestworker system)

**3.Patterns of Racism**

The past is not another country – it is always with us. Look at election literature and how it draws on national myths. Politicians set the tone for everyone else – legitimise racism. (Brexit Study – note,

In April 2015, five Czech NGOs wrote an open letter said that Zeman is the architect of a hatred that is poisoning society, as a top politician he is the one deciding on the atmosphere in society.

Present campaigns around removing statues, US, UK, Czech pig farm at Lety and how the far-Right tried to instrumentalise that to defend Czech Republic and say it was a ‘labour camp’.

**Culture wars and memory wars**

Nationalism is also built on internal outsider dichotomies. The idea of the organic nation into which all minorities must assimilate – those who don’t are considered traitors...

Parallel developments in the EU with the white supremacy movements fomenting culture wars over the removal of confederate monuments that commemorate white supremacy

Slavery and white supremacy in the US – authoritarian, fascist and colonial figures in Europe

And it is the New Right fomenting the culture wars

Hungary: construction of national memorial portraying Hungary as the victim of the German occupation; erection of statues celebrating anti-semitic politicians associated with the Horthy era

Poland – attempts to criminalise those who seek to explore issues of collaboration with the Holocaust following the German invasion of 1939.

Pawel Pawilikowski’s film Ida

(images of confederate statues being taken down)

It is also there in our educational text books and patterns of segregated living in housing, but also in the way that police forces organise and whether they are responsive to the needs of racial communities. Here we can see institutional racism – but if this is sanctioned by the state, we can talk of state racism.

And in our vocabulary. inadaptable’ – the term Himmler used when he gave the order to deport all remaining Roma and Sinti to Auschwitz.

Summer 2013 protests of the so-called ‘decent citizens’ against ‘inadaptable citizens’ swept through Bohemia in the Czech Republic

**4. Strategies of Resistance**

**Racism should not be accommodated, or tolerated, but resisted. Of course, that does not mean that we don’t dialogue with people with racialist attitudes (prejudice) to, in your words (dis)connect tensions, or provide pathways back into society for those who have shown remorse for joining racist organisations, but it does mean that we take a firm stance when people act on those attitudes (discriminatory behaviour) and that we actively combat any groups who promote racism or incite hatred and we tell politicians that there is a bar that cannot be crossed.**

**But if we are going to do all this, we have to be organised, we have to build inclusive structures and we have ensure that there are laws that ensure fair play, and restrict the tyranny of the majority (monoculturalism, assimilation)**

\*In the UK, **we fought for better anti-discrimination measures**. They weren’t very good, and we struggled to get them made better. In 2000 the Race Relations Amendment Act was introduced extending the outlawing of race discrimination to public authorities and placed on them a general duty to promote race equality.

Concept of race relations – leading to policies based on integration not assimilation. Development of Community Relations Councils – buffer organisations or frontline organisations – defence of democracy and pluralism

Anti-discrimination laws are educative, they can change public attitudes and pave way for integration – it raises the threshold of what is tolerable in a liberal society

(Stephen Lawrence image)

\* **Electoral racism** – calling out comments and leaflets. We disconnect tensions by removing the political candidates who are making the tensions. The US initiative against those who cross the bar. The point is that they built a campaign NOT to get a specific candidate elected but to get one defeated and ousted thereby not setting themselves up to be cheerleaders for any single candidate but rather for a set of principles. (Image)

\* **Standing alongside those who suffer racism and building communities of resistance and strong anti-fascist structures**

Question of ensuring police are under full democratic control - campaigns against racial profiling, racist databases and also to ensure that police respond to racial violence. Czech Republic has a long history – turn cases into issues, issues into causes, causes into national campaigns.

\***Identifying Institutional racism** – the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin’. This can be direct or indirect and can be ‘seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people’. (Macpherson 2000)

But if you are going to campaign against institutional racism, you must break it down. Institute of Race Relations were documenting the racism of the police, we tried to show how structured racism manifested itself in police procedures (racial profiling, arbitrary arrest), in police operations (deployment of special squads, targeting of Black meeting places) leading to police harassment, greater violence in everyday encounters and deaths in police custody. We also broke down the police response to racist and far-Right violence in terms of the policing of fascism (failure to protect the community from far-Right demonstrations, harsher treatment of anti-fascists, criminalisation of self-defence), the structural denial of racism (failing to acknowledge racial motivation, blaming the victim, etc). We brought our findings together in a series of reports built on hundreds of case studies.

For instance, Policing Against Black People (1987), Deadly Silence (1991) and most recently Dying for Justice (2015, Outcast England)

Race Relations Amendment Act for the first time brought not only the police but all public bodies (schools, health services, police, prisons) under the full force of the law and bound them to actively promote racial equality.

Denial isn’t just a personal quality, it is ‘built into the ideological facade of the state’. (Stanley Cohen, States of Denial: knowing about atrocities and suffering’

\* Anti-fascism - the question of defending people against the far Right and also pan European solidarity. Hungarian case ‘Captive Audience)

UK Parliamentary Meeting when we worked with Roma groups in the UK and produced the Youtube Film Captive Audience)

Summer 2013 protests of the so-called ‘decent citizens’ against ‘inadaptable citizens’ swept through Bohemia in the Czech Republic. Protest Actions Against Inadaptable Citizens name of the Facebook page for the rally in Ceske Budejovice.

**5. Conclusions**

**Racism separates us – it allows us to brutalise and demonise people held to be the other.**

**The whole basis of current racism is ‘nativism’ – our own people first, creating a monocultural, monofaith community that excludes others. It is a vision of a racially and culturally pure community.**

**So as we build community from the bottom up, we must build a community that resists nativism, that embraces the multicultural society, that includes – and shields – the other, that amplifies its voice and embraces its concerns. We dialogue with the majority from a position of strength. We ride two horses at once – disconnecting tensions even as we fight for institutional change that guarantees fair play. The interpersonal is political. Sometimes it is not possible to dissolve tensions, but in coming together against the social divide we transcend the social divide. Who we are is what we do?**